Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1.   (Original) A system for monitoring at least one computing hardware device located on a computer network, comprising,

a testing means in communication with the computer network and arranged to send a first query message to query the status of the at least one computing device, and a second query message specific to the at least one computing device,

wherein, if one of the first and second query message is not responded to by the computing device, the testing means registers an alarm condition.

2.   (Original) A hardware device arranged for monitoring a plurality of computing systems interconnected on a computer network, the device comprising,

means for sending a query message to each of the plurality of computing systems,

means for receiving a reply message from each of the plurality of computing systems,

wherein, if a reply message is not received within a defined period of time, the hardware device registers an alarm condition.

3.   (Original) A system in accordance with claim 2, further comprising means to send a second query request to at least one of the plurality of computing systems, wherein, if a reply message to the second query request is not received within a defined period of time, the hardware device registers an alarm condition.

4.   (Original) A system in accordance with claim 3, comprising receiving means for receiving an information message from a software application residing on the computing system, wherein the information message contains information pertaining to the identity of the computing device.

5.　(Original)　A system in accordance with claim 4, wherein the query message is a ping request.

6.　(Currently Amended)　A system in accordance with claim 1 ~~or 5~~, wherein the query message is encrypted.

7.　(Original)　A system in accordance with claim 6, wherein the second query message is sent via the telephone network.

8.　(Original)　A system in accordance with claim 6, further comprising requesting means for requesting an authorisation code from an agent.

9.　(Original)　A system in accordance with claim 2, wherein the alarm condition is communicated via a telephone network.

10.　(Original)　A system in accordance with claim 2, wherein the alarm condition is communicated via an email message.

11.　(Currently Amended)　A system in accordance with ~~any one of the preceding claims~~ claim 1, further comprising logging means to log the response received to the query message.

12.　(Original)　A method for detecting the absence of at least one of a plurality of computing systems interconnected on a computer network, the method comprising the steps of,

sending a first query message to at least one of the plurality of computing systems,

receiving a first reply message from the at least one of the plurality of computing systems,

sending a second query message in a format only recognisable by the at least one of the plurality of computing systems,

receiving a second reply message in a format only recognisable by the at least one of the plurality of computing systems,

wherein, if the second reply message is not received within a predetermined period of time, an alarm condition is raised by the hardware device.

13. (Original) A method for detecting the absence of at least one of a plurality of computing systems interconnected on a computer network, the method comprising the steps of,

sending a first query message to at least one of the plurality of computing systems,

receiving a first reply message from the at least one of the plurality of computing systems, and, if no first reply message is received within a predetermined period of time,

sending a second query message to an agent responsible for the at least one of the plurality of computing systems,

receiving a second reply message from the agent responsible for the at least one of the plurality of computing systems,

wherein, if the second reply message is not received within a predetermined period of time, an alarm condition is raised by the hardware device.

14. (Original) A method for determining the absence of at least one computing device on a computing network, comprising the steps of,

sending a first query message via the computing network to the at least one computing device,

awaiting receipt of a reply message from the at least one computing device,

wherein, if the reply message is not received within a predetermined period of time, a second query message is delivered via an alternative network to an agent associated with the computing device, and

if the second query message is not responded to within a predetermined period of time, an alarm condition is raised.

15.   (Original)   A method in accordance with claim 14, comprising the further step of receiving an information message from a software application residing on the computing device, whereby the information message contains information pertaining to the identity of the computing device.

16.   (Original)   A method in accordance with claim 15, whereby the first query message is a ping request.

17.   (Currently Amended)   A method in accordance with claim 14 ~~or 16~~, wherein the first query message is encrypted.

18.   (Original)   A method in accordance with claim 17, whereby the second query message is sent via the telephone network.

19.   (Original)   A method in accordance with claim 14, comprising the further step of requesting an authorisation code from an agent.

20.   (Original)   A method in accordance with claim 14, whereby the alarm condition is communicated via a telephone network.

21.   (Original)   A method in accordance with claim 14, whereby the alarm condition is communicated via an email message.

22.   (Currently Amended)   A method in accordance with ~~any one of the preceding claims~~ claim 14, comprising the further step of logging each response to the query message.

23.   (Original) An apparatus for the monitoring at least one computing device located on a computer network, comprising testing means in communication with the computer network and arranged to determine whether the at least one computing device is connected to the computing network, and, if the testing means determines that the at least one computing

device is not connected to the computing network, the testing means is arranged to send a message to an agent associated with the computing device, requesting a return authorisation message to indicate that the at least one computing device is authorised to be disconnected from the network.

24.   (Original) An apparatus in accordance with claim 23, further comprising reporting means arranged to provide historical information on return authorisation messages received by the apparatus.

25.   (Original) An apparatus in accordance with claim 24 further including configuration means arranged to vary the frequency at which the testing means determines whether the at least one computing device is connected to the computing network.

26.   (Original) An apparatus in accordance with claim 25, further including receiving means arranged to receive information from the at least one computing device, the information including information regarding the status and configuration of at least one computing device.

27.   (Currently Amended) A computer program arranged, when loaded on a computing system, to implement the method ~~any one of claims 12, 13 or 14~~ of claim 12.

28.   (Original) A computer readable medium providing a computer program in accordance with claim 27.